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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: COM URGES PM THACI AND PRESIDENT SEJDIU TO
ACT ON AHTISAARI LEGISLATION, MAKE KOSOVO SERBS A PRIORITY

REF: PRISTINA 11

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: A day after the installation of the new government in Kosovo (reftel), COM and ICOPT head Jonsson paid a call on newly re-elected President Sejdiu, PM Thaci, and Thaci's two deputy prime ministers. COM and Jonsson used the opportunity to urge the government to make its top priority the swift preparation of Ahtisaari package and status-related legislation, especially those laws relating to the Kosovo Serb community, and completion of Kosovo's new draft Constitution. To this end, COM asked Thaci to name a high-level point of contact in his office who could deal solely with Ahtisaari legislation, and also urged that Thaci and Sejdiu approach the new parliamentary opposition parties to include them in Ahtisaari working groups, as well as in the working group on the Constitution. Regarding Kosovo Serbs, COM asked Thaci to come up with concrete proposals, backed by meaningful budgetary resources, to help this community, and noted that USOP would soon come to him with some specific ideas. She asked him to focus particularly on Serb property issues. Thaci agreed to all this, and acknowledged that his new government had little time to accomplish these objectives. He said he would open an "Office for Communities" under his direct authority which would have staff members dealing solely with Serb property issues. At the suggestion of COM, and in the further interest of building political consensus around the passage of Ahtisaari-related legislation, Thaci also agreed to include the opposition AAK party on the Assembly Presidency despite the numerical limits precluding their participation. (He and President Sejdiu later requested that SRSR Ruecker approve this change, which requires an amendment to Kosovo's current Constitutional Framework.) END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) COM and International Civilian Office Planning Team (ICOPT) head Jonas Jonsson met January 11 with President Sejdiu, PM Thaci, and Thaci's two deputy prime ministers, Hajredin Kuci and Rame Manaj. They congratulated Sejdiu on his re-election and Thaci on his installation as prime minister by the Kosovo Assembly on January 9 (ref), and promised to assist the new government.

Ahtisaari legislation/draft Constitution must be top priorities

13. (C) Jonsson opened by noting the immense importance for Kosovo and its new government to be seen by European member states as finalizing preparation of the Ahtisaari package and status-related legislation and completing work on Kosovo's draft Constitution. He added that those laws dealing with cultural and religious heritage, as well as decentralization (i.e., affecting mainly the Kosovo Serb community), were of particular interest. Jonsson also urged PM Thaci to include the new opposition parties coming out of the November 17, 2007 elections on the Ahtisaari working groups and the working group on the Constitution, in the interest of creating the broadest possible support for ultimate passage of Ahtisaari legislation in the Kosovo Assembly.

14. (C) COM echoed this message and emphasized that failure to have this legislation ready could negatively affect the willingness of countries to quickly recognize Kosovo's independence. To get things moving, COM asked that Thaci name a high-level point of contact in his office who would deal solely with Ahtisaari and status-related legislation. She noted that this person would need to have sufficient clout to spur ministers and others to action. COM offered jointly with ICOPT to conduct an introductory session the week of January 14 for new ministers and deputy ministers to educate them on the specific laws, process, and timeframe for Ahtisaari package legislation.

Include the Opposition

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15. (C) COM underscored again the need to include the new opposition parties, the AKR and LDD, on the Ahtisaari working groups, as well as to maintain good relations with the opposition representatives from Ramush Haradinaj's AAK and Vetton Surroi's ORA party in support of Ahtisaari. In this same vein, she asked Thaci to include AAK, which came in a close fifth in the November 2007 elections, on the Assembly Presidency, despite constitutional limits on the number of seats available. Thaci agreed to do so without hesitation. (Note: USOP later confirmed that he and Sejdiu subsequently asked SRSR Ruecker to approve the change to Kosovo's current Constitutional Framework (CF) for this to happen. The CF only permits the top four vote-getting parties on the Presidency, but Ruecker has already indicated that he would change this to allow the AAK to be present, if the governing parties made the request. End Note.)

Demonstrate your commitment to Kosovo, s Serbs

16. (C) COM indicated to Thaci that demonstrating his new government's commitment to the Kosovo Serb community must be a paramount objective, and that rhetorical support -- as he had usefully offered in his acceptance speech before the Assembly on January 9 -- must/must be supplemented with real initiatives, with budgetary resources behind them, that can make a difference. The handover of two important ministries, including the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry, to Serbs was a good start, but just a start. She noted that property issues were at the top of the list of Kosovo Serb concerns, and urged that Thaci place someone in his office who would deal directly with these problems. COM further noted that USOP would meet with Thaci in the near future to discuss specific ideas for further assistance to Kosovo Serbs. Jonsson added that what the new government did with regard to Kosovo Serbs would be decisive in shaping EU thinking.

Thaci acknowledges he must act now

17. (C) Thaci acknowledged that his new government had little time to accomplish all these serious objectives. He agreed to name a high-level point of contact in his office on

Ahtisaari and status-related legislation, as well as hold a cabinet session on the government's responsibilities under the Ahtisaari process, and said he would establish an "Office for Communities" under the PM's umbrella that would have specific staff to deal with Kosovo Serb property issues. Thaci also asserted that he recognized the importance of coming up with concrete initiatives for the Serb community. (Note: In a separate meeting between USAID director and incoming Finance Minister Ahmet Shala on the same day, Shala indicated that he and Thaci had already conversed on this subject and that they were intent on making serious budgetary resources available for Serb-related economic programs. COM will meet with Shala this week to follow up on this initiative.)

Comment:

18. (C) The meeting with President Sejdiu and PM Thaci was key to demonstrating that USOP and ICOPT are jointly committed to pushing the new government forward on Ahtisaari implementation, and that both the U.S. and EU are united behind the message that measures to help Kosovo Serbs must have special priority. We are following up all this week with individual USOP and USAID meetings on the same theme with new government ministers, as well as holding the joint ICOPT-USOP introductory session for ministers on Ahtisaari legislation. COM made the points on Kosovo Serb issues once more to PM Thaci the morning of January 14 (reported septel) as part of a general message on the urgency of completing vital tasks related to Ahtisaari in the weeks ahead.
KAIDANOW